The Door of Hope in the Valley of Trouble

Open your Bibles to Hosea chapter 2. I want to bring a message from one verse, but that one verse carries us through a great deal of Scripture. Hosea 2:15 says, "And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt."

Notice what God promises to Israel. He promises her a door of hope. He says that through this door she will sing again as she did in the days of her youth and as she did when she came up out of Egypt. That means God is speaking of restoration, renewed joy, renewed blessing, and a return to fellowship and usefulness under His hand.

Everyone needs hope. The sick need hope. The discouraged need hope. The man who goes hunting needs hope, or he will not go out again. The fisherman needs hope, or he will not cast the line again. There is an old saying that hope springs eternal in the human breast, and there is truth in that. We were made in such a way that we cannot live long without some expectation that there is a door ahead of us and that the darkness is not the end of the story.

But biblical hope is not shallow optimism. It is not the confidence that things will somehow improve because men are basically good or because institutions will correct themselves. Biblical hope rests upon the character, covenant, promises, and government of God. Hope says, "God is still God. His throne has not moved. His Word has not failed. His arm has not shortened." That is the kind of hope Hosea is speaking about.

The hope God gives is not escape from reality. It is hope in the middle of reality. It does not close its eyes to sin. It does not pretend that judgment is unnecessary. It looks at the valley of trouble, names it honestly, and still says, "God can make even this valley a door." That is the hope we need, because sentimental religion will not sustain us in an evil day.

When I look around at the condition of our land, I know that we need hope. Anyone who has any grasp of what is happening around us must ask, "Where is this going? How long can a people continue in this direction?" We live in a time when innocent blood has been shed by the millions, when the divorce rate has devastated homes, when socialism, Marxism, and communism are openly promoted, when moral perversion is defended and legalized, and when the law of God is treated as though it were a thing to be mocked rather than obeyed.

We have courts that often act as though they are above righteousness. We have lawmakers who often care more for power than for justice or the Constitution. We have an executive spirit in the land that does what it pleases. We live in a day when God is denied, His law is trampled under foot, righteousness is laughed at, justice is mocked, and faithful Christians are despised. It seems, at times, that the onslaught of a godless order is almost impossible to stop.

So the question comes to us: how do we escape? What is our hope? The truth is that God called His people to exercise dominion under Him, and we have failed. In Genesis 1, God gave Adam and Eve dominion over the earth. In Genesis 9, He repeated that command to Noah. Psalm 8 speaks of man being crowned with glory and honor under God, with the works of God's hands placed under him. When we come to Matthew 28 and read the Great Commission, we are not reading something disconnected from dominion. We are reading the command of the risen Christ to disciple nations under His authority.

Dominion does not mean tyranny. It does not mean that Christians rule by pride, cruelty, or fleshly force. Biblical dominion means responsible, obedient stewardship under the Lordship of God. It means we bring every area of life under the authority of His Word. It means the home, the church, work, money, law, education, and civil life are not neutral territories. Christ is Lord over all of them.

When God's people abandon this calling, a vacuum is created. And when the righteous refuse to stand, the wicked do not sit down and wait. They move in. They write the laws, control the institutions,

shape the culture, educate the children, and define what is acceptable. Then Christians look around in alarm and wonder how the darkness became so thick. It became thick because the light was hidden.

The word dominion itself appears many times in our Bibles. We cannot pretend the idea is foreign to Scripture. Our Lord said in Luke 19:13, "Occupy till I come." That word means to do business, to keep at the work, to be faithful in the calling He has given. Whatever else it means, it does not mean that we sit idly by and do nothing while evil men rule and righteousness collapses.

Have we failed in this country as Christians? I believe we have. Our Lord said that we are the salt of the earth, and one of the functions of salt is preservation. So I have to ask, what have we preserved? I am speaking of professing Christians as a whole. I know that not everyone who professes Christ possesses Christ. I understand that. But when we look at the broad state of the churches, we often see division, vindictiveness, jealousy, suspicion, and a refusal to cooperate unless someone can control the whole thing.

Our Lord said in Matthew 5:13, "Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" Salt that does not preserve is useless for its calling. Light that is hidden under a bushel does not illuminate the house. I do not say this to cast stones at others while excusing myself. I say it because the Word of God requires us to begin with honest confession.

We have often substituted activity for obedience, programs for holiness, slogans for faith, and political irritation for biblical repentance. We have talked about what the wicked are doing while refusing to ask what the people of God have failed to do. But Hosea's door of hope begins with truth. We cannot walk through that door while carrying the accursed thing under the tent.

Many ministers have the same weakness. As long as they can be in charge, they are willing to serve. But if they cannot run the work, if it cannot be done according to their plan, they often want no part of it. The same spirit can be found in the patriotic community as well. Many so-called patriots are just as divided and fractured as the churches. If you do not follow their plan, their strategy, and their ideas, they treat you as an enemy or a traitor. That is not dominion. That is pride dressed up in religious or political language.

Some people answer all of this by saying, "The Bible tells us that in the last days evil men shall wax worse and worse, so there is nothing we can do. We might as well sit back and wait for the Lord to return." But I have several questions about that. Are we to sit back like the five foolish virgins in Matthew 25, with our lamps going out? Are we to sit back like the unjust steward in Luke 12, who became drunken, disobedient, and abusive? Are we to sit back like the rich fool, who gathered everything for himself and died before he could enjoy it?

Noah waited on the Lord while building the ark. Abraham waited while walking by faith in a land of promise. Joseph waited in prison without surrendering integrity. David waited for the throne while refusing to murder Saul. Waiting on the Lord never meant indifference, laziness, or compromise. It meant faithful obedience while God worked according to His own time.

Therefore, I cannot accept a doctrine of waiting that becomes an excuse for cowardice. I cannot call unbelief spirituality. I cannot say, "The world is bad, so I will do nothing." The Lord did not tell us to occupy until things become difficult. He said, "Occupy till I come."

There is a biblical doctrine of waiting upon the Lord. I believe that. But waiting on the Lord never means folding our hands in disobedience. It never means excusing unbelief by calling it patience. Biblical waiting is faithful, obedient, watchful, and prayerful. It is not passive surrender to evil.

Now the Bible tells us that God has given His people a door of hope. Someone may say, "I know what that door of hope is. The door of hope is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ." I believe with all my heart in the personal, visible, bodily return of Jesus Christ. I believe He is coming back literally, personally, and visibly. When He appears, everything will be made perfectly right. First John 3:2 says, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

Jesus Christ is the perfect answer. When He returns, He will set all things right in absolute perfection. But my question is this: must we wait until the final return of Christ before God gives any measure of restoration in time and in history? Must we wait until then before God judges wickedness, restores His people, and gives them room to sing again? The answer from Scripture is no.

The hope of His coming should purify us, not paralyze us. First John 3:3 says, "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." The hope of Christ's appearing should make us more holy, more watchful, more faithful, and more courageous. It should not make us careless about the present.

If a man says he believes the King is coming, then he ought to be busy in the King's business. If a servant knows his master will return, he should be found faithful, not asleep, drunk, fearful, or idle. The coming of Christ is not a reason to abandon the field. It is a reason to labor with confidence.

Hosea 2:15 says, "And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope." God is promising restoration. He is promising that His people will sing again. He is promising the return of joy, blessing, obedience, and fruitfulness. A door of hope is a door of restoration. It is an entrance into the will and blessing of God. But we must notice carefully what God says the door is. He says He will give Israel the valley of Achor for a door of hope.

If we are going to understand the door of hope, we must understand the valley of Achor. The door is not described as a beautiful meadow, a high mountain, or a quiet garden. It is called the valley of Achor. That name is rooted in trouble. It takes us back to judgment. It takes us back to the story of Achan. It takes us back to the place where sin had to be exposed and judged before God's people could go forward.

Names in Scripture often carry meaning. Achor means trouble. The valley of Achor is the valley of trouble. God does not say, "I will give you a way around trouble." He says He will make the valley of trouble itself a door of hope. That is very different from the way we often think. We usually want hope without exposure, restoration without repentance, blessing without chastening, and victory without judgment.

But God is too holy and too merciful to give that kind of false peace. He will not build restoration on top of unconfessed sin. He will not bless rebellion by pretending it is merely weakness. He will not bring His people forward while the accursed thing remains hidden in the camp.

Hold Hosea in mind and look at Isaiah 65. In Isaiah 65:9-10, the Lord says, "And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there. And Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for the herds to lie down in, for my people that have sought me."

There are several truths in that passage. First, God has a seed. He has an elect people. I do not care how corrupt professing Christendom becomes, how many people apostatize, or how wicked the age grows, God still has His people. He still has a remnant. His elect shall inherit what He has promised. No power in earth or hell can erase that.

Sharon was known as a fertile and pleasant region. To speak of Sharon as a fold of flocks and Achor as a resting place for herds is to speak of abundance after desolation. God takes the language of judgment and fills it with the promise of restoration. The place remembered for trouble becomes a place where the flock can lie down.

That should encourage us. God can take the very place where we failed and make it the place where He teaches us to stand. He can take the memory that shames us and turn it into a testimony of mercy. He can make the valley where sin was exposed the doorway through which new obedience begins.

Second, the valley of Achor is pictured as a place where herds lie down. I was raised around farm life, and I know something about cattle. Cattle do not lie down to rest in contentment until they have eaten their fill. A place where the herds lie down is a place of abundance, safety, and satisfaction. God

says that Achor, the very valley associated with trouble and judgment, will become a place of rest for the people who seek Him.

Third, Isaiah 65 makes a sharp distinction between those who seek the Lord and those who forsake Him. In verses 11-15, God speaks to those who forget His holy mountain and turn to idols. He says they will be numbered to the sword because when He called, they did not answer; when He spoke, they did not hear; but they did evil before His eyes and chose that in which He delighted not. The servants of God will eat, drink, and rejoice, but the rebels will hunger, thirst, and be ashamed.

So the valley of Achor appears again as a place connected to blessing for God's people, but that blessing comes in the setting of judgment against those who forsake the Lord. This is important, because when the Bible speaks of valleys, it often speaks of judgment. Christ is the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the valleys, and He is Lord of the valleys as surely as He is Lord of the mountains. But many of the valleys in Scripture are valleys where God brings men to decision, exposure, and judgment.

Joel 3:14 says, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision." Many times that verse has been used as though it were about sinners standing undecided about whether to come to Christ. Now, sinners certainly must come to Christ. But in its context, that passage is not about an invitation hymn. It is about judgment. Verse 13 says, "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great."

The word translated decision carries the idea of cutting or threshing. This is not a gentle scene of men weighing their options. It is the scene of the Lord bringing the harvest of wickedness under the sickle. The nations have filled up their measure, and God is near in the valley. The decision belongs to Him, not to them.

That is why we must be careful not to weaken the language of Scripture. God is not merely a counselor waiting to be invited. He is the Judge of all the earth. He gives invitations of mercy, yes, but He also announces days of reckoning. When the valley of decision comes, the Lord decides, the Lord judges, and the Lord vindicates His own name.

The valley of decision is the valley where God judges. The sun and moon are darkened, the stars withdraw their shining, the Lord roars out of Zion, and the heavens and earth shake. Yet in that same context, the Lord is the hope of His people and the strength of the children of Israel. Again, judgment and hope stand together. Judgment falls upon the wicked, and hope rises for the people of God.

Now go back to the valley of Achor itself. First Chronicles 2:7 says, "And the sons of Carmi; Achar, the troubler of Israel, who transgressed in the thing accursed." Achar is the same man we know as Achan. He is called the troubler of Israel because he transgressed in the accursed thing. To understand Hosea's door of hope, we must go back to Joshua 6 and 7.

In Joshua 6, Israel stood before Jericho. God had given very clear instructions. The city was devoted to judgment. Rahab and her household would be spared because she received the messengers, but Israel was not to take the accursed thing for personal gain. Joshua 6:17-19 says that the city was accursed, even it and all that was therein, unto the Lord. The silver, gold, brass, and iron were consecrated unto the Lord and were to come into His treasury. Israel was to keep itself from the accursed thing lest the whole camp be made a curse and troubled.

But Joshua 7:1 says, "But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing." That statement is striking. It says Israel committed the trespass, but Achan was the man who did it. One man's sin brought guilt, defeat, and trouble upon the nation. Achan, the son of Carmi, took of the accursed thing, and the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel.

After Jericho, Joshua sent men to spy out Ai. They returned and said the city was small. They told Joshua that not all the people needed to go up. Two or three thousand men would be enough. So about three thousand men went up, and they fled before the men of Ai. Thirty-six Israelites were killed. The hearts of the people melted and became as water.

Joshua fell on his face before the ark of the Lord. He and the elders of Israel put dust upon their heads. Joshua cried out in grief, wondering why the Lord had brought them across Jordan only to deliver them into the hand of the Amorites. He feared that the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land would hear of the defeat, surround Israel, cut off their name from the earth, and dishonor the great name of the Lord.

But the Lord said to Joshua, "Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? Israel hath sinned." God told Joshua that Israel had transgressed His covenant, taken of the accursed thing, stolen, dissembled, and hidden it among their own stuff. Then the Lord said in Joshua 7:12, "Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed: neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you."

That was the terrible part. The defeat was bad. The death of thirty-six soldiers was grievous. But the worst thing was that God said He would not be with them any more unless they dealt with the accursed thing. Israel could not go forward. They could not conquer. They could not exercise dominion. They could not enter fully into the promise while hidden sin remained in the camp.

The tribes were brought forward, then the families, then the households, until Achan was taken. Joshua said, "My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the LORD God of Israel, and make confession unto him." Achan confessed that he had seen among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight. He coveted them, took them, and hid them in the earth in the midst of his tent.

Do you see the steps? He saw. He coveted. He took. He hid. That is the old pattern of sin. The eye, the desire, the hand, and then the cover-up. It was not merely a private weakness. It was rebellion against the clear command of God, and it brought the whole camp under judgment.

Covetousness is never a small matter. Achan did not merely take a garment and some silver. He despised the command of God, robbed the Lord of what had been consecrated to Him, and chose Babylonish treasure over covenant obedience. The garment was Babylonish, and that detail matters. Even at the beginning of conquest, Achan's heart was already reaching back toward the world God had doomed.

Sin often appears profitable in the moment. It looks like a garment, silver, and gold. But it carries defeat inside it. Achan thought he was enriching himself, but he was bringing death into his house and weakness into the camp of Israel. Hidden sin never remains as private as we imagine. It leaks judgment into places we did not expect.

Joshua sent messengers, and they found the stolen things hidden in Achan's tent. Then Joshua and all Israel took Achan, the silver, the garment, the wedge of gold, his household, his animals, his tent, and all that he had, and brought them to the valley of Achor. Joshua said, "Why hast thou troubled us? the LORD shall trouble thee this day." Achan was judged there, and a great heap of stones was raised over him. Then the fierce anger of the Lord was turned away. Therefore that place was called the valley of Achor.

That is the valley God later calls a door of hope. Think about that carefully. The valley of Achor was the place where hidden sin was exposed. It was the place where the accursed thing was removed. It was the place where God's people stopped pretending that defeat was a mystery and admitted that sin was the problem. It was the place where judgment cleared the way for mercy.

The heap of stones in the valley of Achor was a sermon in stone. It said, "God is holy. Sin troubles the people of God. Hidden rebellion cannot be made safe by burying it." Every Israelite who passed that place would remember that victory is not merely a matter of numbers, strategy, or courage. Victory depends upon the presence and favor of God.

Achan's name became attached to trouble because he troubled Israel. But God later attached hope to that same valley because the trouble was dealt with. The same place that testified of judgment also testified that God had not abandoned His people. He judged in order to restore.

Jericho was only the beginning of the wars of Canaan. Ai should have been a small battle, but because of hidden sin, it became a humiliating defeat. If Israel could not stand before Ai, how could they stand before the mighty enemies of the land? The door to Canaan had slammed shut in their faces. God said, in effect, "You cannot go forward until this is dealt with."

When God says in Hosea 2:15 that He gives the valley of Achor for a door of hope, He is saying that honest judgment is the doorway to restoration. He is not saying that sin can be overlooked. He is not saying that blessing comes by pretending nothing is wrong. He is saying that when sin is brought into the light, judged by His Word, and removed in obedience, then hope opens again.

This is why cheap preaching cannot help us. A message that only says, "Everything will be all right," while refusing to confront sin is not a door of hope. It is a painted door on a prison wall. Real hope comes when God tells the truth about us, brings sin into the light, grants repentance, and restores us on righteous terms.

If a church has hidden sin, it must be dealt with. If a family has hidden sin, it must be dealt with. If a nation has institutionalized rebellion against God, it must be dealt with. We do not decide the terms of restoration. God does. The valley of Achor teaches us that the way forward is obedience, not concealment.

That is true for individuals. It is true for families. It is true for churches. It is true for nations. The door of hope is not found by hiding the accursed thing. It is found by bringing it before God and dealing with it according to His Word.

Let me point out something that is often overlooked. The sin that truly troubles you is usually not the sin that will finally overthrow you. If you are troubled by it, if you grieve over it, if you are confessing it and fighting it, there is hope. The sin that is most dangerous is the one you can commit without being troubled. It is the sin you can hide, excuse, and protect until your conscience becomes quiet.

One of the greatest mercies God can give us is the exposure of our sins. We are embarrassed when our sins are uncovered. We feel humiliated. We may even be more upset that we were caught than that we sinned. But if God exposes sin in order to bring us to repentance, that exposure is mercy. It is painful mercy, but it is mercy.

Think of David. After David committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged the death of Uriah, he tried to cover his sin. He attempted to bring Uriah home so the child would appear to be Uriah's. When Uriah would not go down to his house, David made him drunk, and still Uriah would not cooperate. Then David sent him back to the battle with the letter that arranged his death. David thought the matter was covered. But God knew.

David's repentance in Psalm 51 shows what true exposure is meant to produce. He did not say, "I made a mistake." He said, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." He asked God to create in him a clean heart and renew a right spirit within him. That is the fruit of mercy. Exposure without repentance only hardens. Exposure with grace brings cleansing.

If Nathan had never come, David might have remained under the weight of hidden sin. But the Lord loved David too much to let him rot under his own deceit. We need that same mercy. We need God to send His Word to us and say, "Thou art the man," so that we may fall before Him and find forgiveness.

Second Samuel 12 says that the Lord sent Nathan unto David. Nathan told the story of a rich man who took the one little ewe lamb of a poor man. David's sense of justice burned hot, and he said the man should restore fourfold and die. Then Nathan said, "Thou art the man." That was a terrible moment, but it was also mercy. God loved David enough to uncover the sin David had tried to bury.

We need to understand that principle in our own homes. We love our children. Many of us would die for them. But when our children do wrong, they must learn that sin has consequences. He who sins must suffer. I do not mean that parents should be cruel or without compassion. I mean that we should not constantly rescue our children from the very consequences God may use to teach them wisdom.

When a child does wrong and we immediately run to bail him out of every consequence, we may think we are showing love, but we may be interfering with mercy. Sometimes the kindest thing is to let a child feel the weight of what he has done. If he must pay a fine, let him work to pay it. If he has embarrassed himself, let him learn from the embarrassment. If he has chosen foolishly, let him taste enough of the fruit to understand that sin is bitter.

The same principle applies to adults, churches, and nations. A society that refuses consequences trains itself in rebellion. If theft has no consequence, theft increases. If perversion is praised, perversion spreads. If lies are rewarded, truth is despised. Mercy that denies justice becomes cruelty to the innocent and encouragement to the wicked.

God's judgments are not the outbursts of an unstable ruler. They are the acts of a holy and wise Judge. He knows when to warn, when to wait, when to chasten, and when to overthrow. We tremble because we are weak and guilty, but we must not accuse God of evil for doing what is right.

We are often horrified by judgment because we do not want to suffer. None of us enjoys pain. None of us wants trouble. When we think of the judgment of God, we naturally tremble. But we must learn to think biblically. What if God brought down an unrighteous economy overnight? What if He exposed and removed corrupt power structures? What if the institutions that have mocked His law and oppressed His people were shaken to the ground? Would we only call that catastrophe, or would we understand that God's righteous judgment can become a door of hope?

Achan and his household were judged, and the nation was delivered from the accursed thing. The judgment was severe, but it turned away the fierceness of God's anger and opened the way for Israel to go forward. It was God's righteous judgment upon the troubler that brought deliverance and blessing to the rest of the nation.

This pattern is found all through Scripture. It was God's righteous judgment that destroyed the old world and saved Noah and his family alive. It was God's righteous judgment that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and spared Lot. It was God's righteous judgment that destroyed the enemies of Canaan and delivered His people. It was God's righteous judgment that brought down Babylon and Assyria and delivered His people again.

At the Red Sea, Israel's deliverance was Egypt's judgment. The same waters that opened as a path for God's people closed over Pharaoh's army. At the cross, the salvation of the elect came through the judgment borne by Christ. At the final day, the resurrection and vindication of the righteous will come together with the condemnation of the wicked. Scripture never separates these things the way modern sentiment often does.

That is why the people of God should not be ashamed of the doctrine of judgment. We should tremble before it, yes. We should preach it with tears, yes. But we should not apologize for it. A world without judgment is a world where the wicked never answer, the oppressed never see justice, and God's holiness is treated as negotiable.

We have forgotten that judgment and deliverance go together. They are two sides of one coin. You cannot have salvation without judgment. Whenever God judges His enemies, He delivers His people. Whenever God delivers His people, He judges His enemies. The two belong together.

Someone may say, "But I have salvation in Jesus Christ, and that is not judgment." Look at Romans 3:24-25. The Bible says we are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." That word propitiation means satisfaction, appeasement, the turning away of wrath by a righteous sacrifice.

God was angry with us because we were sinners. We were wicked, rebellious, and guilty. We deserved death. We deserved judgment. We deserved hell. But Jesus Christ came as our substitute and representative. He obeyed the law perfectly. He worked out a perfect righteousness. Then He stood in the place of His people, and the wrath that should have fallen upon us fell upon Him.

The cross does not teach that God stopped caring about His law. It teaches that His law is so holy and His justice so perfect that sin could not be dismissed with a wave of the hand. If God spared not

His own Son when He stood in the place of sinners, we should never imagine that God is casual about evil.

Grace is not God pretending sin does not matter. Grace is God providing in Christ what His justice required and what we could never provide. Therefore the gospel itself teaches us to love both mercy and judgment. Mercy saves us. Judgment fell on Christ. Both display the glory of God.

At the cross, salvation came through judgment. The holiness and righteousness of God were not ignored. They were satisfied. Christ bore the judgment so that His people might be delivered. Therefore even the salvation we have in Christ teaches us that judgment and mercy are not enemies. In the wisdom of God, mercy comes through righteous judgment.

Someone else may say, "I do not like to talk about judgment. I would rather only pray for the Lord's return." But when we pray for the Lord's return, we are praying for judgment. Second Thessalonians 1:7-9 says, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The return of Christ is our blessed hope, but it is not a sentimental hope. He will be revealed from heaven with mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who know not God and obey not the gospel. We cannot pray for the return of Christ without praying for the triumph of His justice. Salvation and judgment go together.

This does not mean we rejoice in misery for its own sake. Christians should never be cruel, bloodthirsty, or careless with human suffering. But we must be biblical. If Christ comes to judge, then the longing for His appearing includes the longing for righteousness to prevail and rebellion to be ended. We cannot separate the crown from the sword of justice.

The book of Revelation does not present the victory of Christ as a polite adjustment of world systems. It presents the Lamb conquering, judging, vindicating the martyrs, and bringing Babylon down. The saints cry, "How long, O Lord?" and heaven answers in God's time.

Psalm 9:16 says, "The LORD is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands." Psalm 37:28 says, "For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off." The Lord loves judgment because He loves justice. He does not forsake His saints. He preserves them. But the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.

Read the book of Ezekiel and notice how often God says, "They shall know that I am the LORD." That phrase appears again and again in the setting of judgment. Men may refuse to hear preaching. They may mock the Word. They may despise the messenger. But when God sends judgment, men learn that He is the Lord. That does not mean all will repent. Judgment by itself does not regenerate the heart. But it does make plain that God rules.

Revelation 9 shows us that judgment without converting grace can leave men hardened. Revelation 9:20-21 says that the rest of the men who were not killed by the plagues still repented not of the works of their hands. They continued in idolatry, murders, sorceries, fornication, and thefts. If God sends judgment without saving grace, men may know they are under judgment and still curse Him. Therefore we need both God's justice and God's mercy. We need Him to judge wickedness and grant repentance according to His sovereign grace.

How can this country be turned around? The truth is that we cannot do it in our own strength. But God can. God does not need an atomic bomb. He does not need a militia. He does not need an army of men to accomplish His purpose. He can shake nations with things too small for the eye to see. He can send an angel, and one angel in one night slew one hundred eighty-five thousand Assyrians. God is not limited by our weakness.

This should humble us. We often think in terms of numbers, money, media, courts, and weapons. God can use means, but He is not dependent upon them. He can bring a proud man down with one sleepless night. He can expose what men buried for years. He can make the counsel of the wicked

foolish. He can remove a ruler, shake an economy, or bring a nation to its knees without asking permission from anyone.

Because God is sovereign, our weakness is not the final word. Because God is holy, the wickedness of the age is not the final word. Because God is faithful, the failures of His people are not the final word. The final word belongs to the Lord.

Judgment is a door of hope. If we believe God will overlook the wickedness of a nation forever, we are mistaken. If we believe He will excuse the shedding of innocent blood, the destruction of the family, the contempt for His law, and the hatred of Christ, we are mistaken. God is longsuffering, but He is not indifferent. He may bear long, but He does not forget justice.

In light of this truth, what is our responsibility? First, we must be children of faith. We must believe that God is absolutely sovereign. He is on the throne. He rules all things. He does all His pleasure in heaven and in earth. That means we cannot give in, give up, or give way to despair. We cannot surrender to discouragement as though evil had the final word.

Faith is not denial. Faith does not say that the situation is not serious. Faith looks at the seriousness of the situation and then looks higher. Faith sees the enemies, the corruption, the weakness of the church, and the hardness of the age, and then says, "Nevertheless, our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."

A faithless man measures the future by the visible strength of the enemy. A faithful man measures the future by the promise and power of God. That does not make him careless. It makes him steadfast. He can work without panic, pray without despair, and stand without needing to know every detail of God's plan.

Why should the children of God be hopeless? We belong to the Lord. He governs all things for His glory and the good of His people. We may not understand everything He does. We may not know when or how He will act. But we know who He is. He is righteous. He is faithful. He is covenant-keeping. He is not nervous, and He is not defeated.

There is a story told of a general who was informed that the enemy was in front of him, behind him, and on both sides. His answer was, "Good. They cannot get away from us now." Whether the exact wording belongs to that man or not, the attitude is instructive. Why should we be discouraged when God is on the throne? If we truly believe in the sovereignty of God, that truth should steady our souls.

Second, we must understand and believe that God does judge the wicked in time and in history. Proverbs 11:31 says, "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner." Yes, there are eternal rewards. Yes, the final judgment is coming. But God also acts in history. He blesses obedience and curses disobedience. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 make that plain.

The righteous are recompensed in the earth. God is debtor to no man. If you honor God, He will honor you. Look around at the blessings He has already given. Health, family, friends, provision, ministry, the Word of God, the fellowship of the saints - all of these are mercies in time and history. But the same verse says, "much more the wicked and the sinner." If God recompenses His people in the earth, how much more will He recompense the wicked?

Job 19:29 says, "Be ye afraid of the sword: for wrath bringeth the punishments of the sword, that ye may know there is a judgment." Temporal judgments in history point toward the final judgment to come. When God brings the sword in history, He is reminding men that there is a greater day of reckoning ahead.

Deuteronomy 7:9-10 says, "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; and repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face." God is not embarrassed to judge His enemies. He is not slack. He repays those who hate Him to their face.

This should encourage the people of God. There are powerful men who imagine they can rule the world without God. They hate Christ, despise the Bible, mock righteousness, and use their power to destroy what God has established. Will God judge them? Yes. Will He judge them only in eternity? No. Scripture shows that He can and does judge in time and history as well. He may not do it according to our calendar, but He will not be mocked.

Third, as God's children, we must learn to pray for God's judgment in time and in history. That sounds strange to many modern ears because we have been taught to think of judgment as something unspiritual to mention. But our Lord taught us to pray for justice.

Luke 18 begins with these words: "And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." Then Jesus spoke of a widow who came to an unjust judge. The judge feared not God and regarded not man. The widow kept saying, "Avenge me of mine adversary." For a while he would not, but finally he said that because she troubled him with her continual coming, he would avenge her.

The widow did not ask the judge for personal comfort. She asked for justice. She did not merely ask to feel better about oppression. She asked that the adversary be dealt with. Our Lord used that picture to teach perseverance in prayer. He did not rebuke the widow for asking to be avenged. He used her as an example of continual prayer.

If an unjust judge can be moved by persistence, how much more should we expect the righteous Judge to hear His elect? God may bear long. He may delay according to His wisdom. But delay is not refusal. Longsuffering is not indifference. The Lord hears the cry of His people.

Then our Lord gave the application in Luke 18:6-8: "Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." Jesus Himself teaches us to cry to God for vindication, for justice, for the avenging of His elect. God is not like the unjust judge. He loves righteousness. He cares for His people. He hears their cries.

How many of us have truly cried for God to execute justice? How many of us have asked Him to arise and judge wickedness? We should read the imprecatory prayers in the Bible. They are not prayers of personal revenge. They are not permission for mob violence or private vengeance. Vengeance belongs to the Lord. But they are prayers that ask God to act according to His righteousness and overthrow those who hate Him and oppress His people.

We must keep this distinction clear. Personal vengeance is forbidden. Romans 12:19 says, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." That does not silence prayer for divine justice. It teaches us to put vengeance where it belongs - in God's hands. We do not take the throne. We appeal to the One who sits upon it.

Imprecatory prayer is not the flesh lashing out because it has been offended. It is faith pleading that God would defend His name, His law, His people, and His truth. It is the cry that wickedness would not be allowed to triumph forever.

Psalm 68:1-3 says, "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice." That is an imprecatory prayer. It asks God to arise, scatter His enemies, and make the righteous glad in His deliverance.

We must learn to pray, "Lord, send Your justice. Send Your judgment. Do what we cannot do. We are tired of wickedness being exalted. We are weary of lies being enthroned. We are helpless in ourselves. Lord, arise for Your name's sake." That kind of prayer is not unbelief. It is faith in the God who rules and judges righteously.

Fourth, we must repent of our own sins and live holy, godly lives. If we pray for judgment, we must remember that judgment begins with the house of God. First Peter 4:17 says, "For the time is

come that judgment must begin at the house of God." We cannot honestly ask God to judge wickedness out there while we protect hidden sin in here.

Hebrews 12 teaches that God chastens His children. He scourges every son whom He receives. If we endure chastening, God deals with us as sons. If we are without chastisement, then we are not true sons. First Corinthians 11:31-32 says, "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord." The chastening of God is real, and it is one of the marks of His fatherly love.

A wise child learns to listen to the word before the rod is necessary. A foolish child forces the father to add the rod to the word. Micah 6:9 says, "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it." If God speaks to us through His Word and we refuse to listen, He knows how to speak through chastening. It is far better to hear and obey quickly.

If we genuinely pray for God's judgment, two things will happen. First, we will become more diligent to warn the wicked, because we know judgment is coming. We will not speak lightly about sin if we truly believe God judges. Second, we will become more serious about holiness in our own lives, because God is no respecter of persons. He can chastise His own children, and He will not allow us to make peace with sin.

This is why repentance must not be vague. We should ask God to search us. We should name our sins before Him. Pride, bitterness, cowardice, unbelief, lust, covetousness, prayerlessness, compromise, envy, worldliness - these are not small matters. They are accursed things when we hide them and protect them.

Before we ask God to clean up the nation, we should ask Him to clean up our hearts, our homes, and our churches. That does not mean we stop praying against public evil. It means we pray with clean hands and trembling hearts, knowing that the Judge of all the earth does right.

Fifth, we must learn that judgment is a door of hope. Judgment is not the enemy of God's people. Righteous judgment is our friend. We do not enjoy suffering, and we should not pretend that chastening is pleasant. But there are painful mercies that save life.

If you had cancer, and a surgeon could cut it out and save your life, would you refuse the operation because surgery hurts? Of course not. You would endure the pain because the cancer is the enemy, not the knife. In the same way, when God cuts out corruption, exposes hidden sin, and overthrows wickedness, the pain may be severe, but the purpose is deliverance.

Many people want peace with the cancer left in place. They want national blessing without national repentance. They want family peace without confession. They want church growth without holiness. They want personal comfort without obedience. But God loves us better than that. He will not call disease health simply because we are afraid of the operation.

The valley of Achor may hurt. It may humble us. It may expose what we wanted to keep hidden. But if God meets us there, it becomes the very place where hope begins. Better a painful valley with God than a comfortable tent with stolen treasure under the ground.

Our government will not save us. The Constitution, as valuable as it may be, will not save us. Political plans will not save us. Patriotic organizations will not save us. We cannot save ourselves. If God does not save us, we will not be saved. If God does not in righteous judgment straighten out this nation, it will not be straightened out.

Consider Exodus 5. God sent Moses to Pharaoh with the command, "Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Let my people go." Pharaoh answered, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go." Pharaoh did not recognize the authority of God, and he had no intention of obeying Him.

Then the burdens on Israel grew heavier. Pharaoh accused the people of being idle. He ordered them to make the same number of bricks without being given straw. The officers of the children of Israel cried to Pharaoh, but he would not listen. Then they met Moses and Aaron and blamed them,

saying in effect, "You have made us stink in Pharaoh's eyes, and you have put a sword in their hand to slay us."

Sometimes obedience seems to make things worse before deliverance comes. Moses obeyed God, and Pharaoh increased the burden. The people blamed Moses. Moses cried out in confusion. Yet God had not failed. He was setting the stage so that everyone would know the deliverance came from Him.

We should remember that when we obey and the pressure increases. The first result of faithfulness may not be outward success. It may be greater opposition. But opposition does not mean God is absent. It may mean that God is about to reveal His power in a way that leaves no room for boasting in man.

Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me?" Since Moses had gone to Pharaoh in the Lord's name, Pharaoh had done evil to the people, and the Lord had not yet delivered them at all. Moses was helpless. Aaron was helpless. The elders were helpless. The people were helpless. Pharaoh was hard. Human strength had come to its end.

Then Exodus 6:1 says, "Then the LORD said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh." Those words are powerful. Now shalt thou see. When Moses and Aaron could not do it, when the elders could not do it, when the people could not do it, when the arm of flesh had failed, God said, "Now shalt thou see what I will do." With a strong hand Pharaoh would let them go, and with a strong hand he would drive them out of his land.

That is the lesson we must learn. We are not excused from obedience. We must still do what God commands. We must still speak, pray, work, warn, and stand. But we must not think that deliverance comes by our might or our power. Zechariah 4:6 says, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts."

Second Chronicles 7:14 says, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Notice that God does not begin by saying, "If the wicked will humble themselves." He says, "If my people." The issue begins with the people who bear His name.

That verse is often quoted, but it must be obeyed, not merely admired. Humbling ourselves means we stop defending our pride. Praying means we acknowledge our dependence. Seeking His face means we want God Himself, not merely relief from consequences. Turning from our wicked ways means real repentance, not religious language covering the same old sin.

If God's people will not humble themselves, pray, seek His face, and turn, then why should we expect healing? The door of hope is not opened by blaming everyone else. It is opened when the people called by God's name bow before Him.

There is no reason for the child of God to be consumed by despair when God is on the throne. There is no reason for us to fear righteous judgment as though it were our enemy. Judgment is a door of hope when it comes from the hand of a holy God who loves His people and will not allow the accursed thing to remain forever.

The proper response is not panic. The proper response is repentance, faith, obedience, and prayer. We cry to God, "Avenge Your own elect. Give justice, O God. Arise for Your name's sake. Cut out the cancer. Remove the accursed thing. Restore joy to Your people. Open again the door of hope."

There is a longing in my heart to see old Babylon fall. I want to see every proud system that exalts itself against God brought down. I want to see the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ manifested as the only kingdom that endures forever. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. The nations rage, but He sits upon the throne. Men plot, but His counsel shall stand.

Babylon in Scripture represents more than one ancient city. It becomes a picture of proud, idolatrous, man-centered power standing against God and His people. To desire Babylon's fall is to desire the overthrow of everything that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. It is to desire the triumph of Christ's kingdom and the deliverance of the saints.

And Babylon will fall. Every proud tower will fall. Every throne raised against Christ will fall. Every lie will be exposed. Every false refuge will fail. Only the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ will endure. That is why we do not despair. Our hope is not in the stability of Babylon, but in the certainty of its overthrow by the hand of God.

Let me close with Psalm 44. The psalmist says in verses 1-3, "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old. How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; how thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out. For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them."

The psalmist says, in effect, "Lord, we have heard the old stories. Our fathers told us how You delivered. We know how You drove out the heathen and planted Your people. We know they did not gain the land by their own sword, and their own arm did not save them. It was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance. It was because You favored them."

Then verse 4 says, "Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob." That is the cry we need. Lord, do it again. You are the same God. You are the same King. You have not lost Your power. You have not surrendered Your throne. Command deliverances for Jacob. Give Your people a door of hope in the valley of trouble.

Our hope is in the Lord, in His mercy, in His grace, and also in His judgment. The valley of Achor was not the end of Israel. It was the doorway through which Israel moved forward again. Hidden sin was exposed. The accursed thing was removed. God's anger was turned away. The people could go on. That is why the valley of trouble became a door of hope.

So let us not despise the valley if God is using it to bring us back to Himself. Let us not curse the exposure if it leads to repentance. Let us not fear the shaking if God is removing what cannot stand. Hebrews 12 tells us that the things which can be shaken will be removed, so that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.

The question is not whether judgment is comfortable. It is not. The question is whether it is righteous, necessary, and saving in the hand of God. The valley of Achor answers yes. It was trouble, but it was also a door. It was judgment, but it was also hope.

As individuals, families, churches, and nations, we must deal honestly with sin. We must not hide it under the tent. We must not pretend defeat has no cause. We must confess, repent, and turn to the Lord. We must seek His mercy, His forgiveness, His justice, and His judgment. If He wounds, He wounds to heal. If He cuts, He cuts to remove the cancer. If He judges, He judges so that His people may be delivered and His name may be glorified.

Let us pray. Father, I ask in the name of Jesus Christ that You would speak to us. Help us understand that You have given us the valley of Achor for a door of hope. Teach us to deal honestly with our sins. Teach us to repent as individuals, families, churches, and as a people. Give us grace to turn to Thee and seek Thy mercy and forgiveness. Give us Thy justice and Thy righteous judgment, for in that judgment Thou dost deliver Thy people. Command deliverances for Jacob. Restore the song of Thy people. Open the door of hope. I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.